

How to Help Others After Abortion

A Guide to Helping Those in Your Life Who May Be Hurting

About this booklet

If you know someone who has had or been involved in an abortion — your spouse, partner, family member, friend, co-worker or other loved one — you may find it difficult to know what to say if he or she talks about this experience with you.

Abortion can be a deeply painful, personal and complicated topic. You may not know what led to the abortion or what issues the person may be facing. You may not know what to say to let the person know you want to help, but in a way that doesn't cause added pain.

This booklet includes a background on this issue and a list of “do’s and don’ts” that can help you know what to say — and not say. It is based on the insights of women who have been through this experience and know what helped them. You’ll also find a list of organizations and other resources in the back to help someone who has been through an abortion or may be facing an abortion right now.

Table of Contents

I. How to Help Those Who Are Grieving An Abortion-Related Loss

Support is available if you or someone you love is pregnant or has had an abortion

II. Do’s and Don’ts

What to say — and not say — when talking to someone who has had an abortion

III. Counseling and Other Resources

Pregnancy- and abortion-related help, information and resources for individuals and families — including help for those being coerced to abort

How To Help Those Who Are Grieving An Abortion-Related Loss

Compassionate Ways to Help Open the Door to Healing and Walk with Others on their Journey

Many people have been directly or indirectly hurt in profound ways by abortion. It's not always evident what precursors to abortion may have happened, often behind closed doors.

You can open the door to help for those facing pregnancy-related challenges or for those being coerced, or extend compassion and healing in abortion's aftermath. You don't have to know whether someone has had an abortion or has been otherwise directly or indirectly involved in an abortion. And you don't have to become a trained counselor or an expert in sensitive pregnancy-related loss and post-abortion issues. All you have to do is take a few simple steps that can help open doors for friends and loved ones.

Remember that individual situations vary widely

There are many "walking wounded" whose perspectives may be colored by personal experience or influenced by a subset of harsh political or other "one-size-fits-all" rhetoric. Unwanted abortions are common as are pregnancy-related abuses and professional coercion, negligence or even malpractice or forced abortion. Many men and families have also been directly or indirectly affected in various ways. For any number of reasons, their perspectives may vary widely and their hearts may be hardened. In other cases, people may simply want to keep personal issues personal.

We can still express compassion and offer our encouragement simply by acknowledging that deception and coercion are common and that other abuses often surround pregnancy or abortion-related issues. We can still express a willingness to be there for them. If appropriate, we can share resources for physical, psychological, spiritual or legal assistance, before or after abortion (see the end of this booklet for a list of organizations that can help).

Expressing compassion for these issues will help people who have told you about a past abortion, people who may be troubled by a past abortion, or just in any casual conversation or if someone else brings up the topic of abortion.

In every case, it's good to plant the seeds that can lead to better understanding and future healing for others. It's also good to remind people on all "sides" of this issue that most abortions are unwanted or coerced and many are forced. Snap judgment and stereotypes abound, so it's also good to update people about new evidence and about abortion's abuse of and risk to the fundamental human rights of both the unborn and women.

Remember That Each Person Is at a Different Stage in their Journey

For those already hurt, many factors may influence where they are in the healing process. Many have related issues such as a failed support network, feelings of betrayal or coercion from loved ones at a time of crisis, or betrayal by trusted medical, social service, or other professionals or authorities, even those in schools, hospitals or the helping professions. None of us can know issues related to individual culpability nor are you trying to define or complete the healing process for a particular individual.

Better Understanding and Action on Our Own Part Can Help, Too

Part of their healing process may involve a better understanding on our own part of coercion and of abortion's risks and injustices to women, too. Toward that end, we can all help by better educating individuals, leaders and society with new

evidence in user-friendly formats that most abortions are unwanted or coerced; many forced and that homicide is the leading killer of pregnant women. For those already hurt, the healing process is often a long one. It may require the help of professionals in the psychology, pastoral, legal or medical fields. Certainly a better understanding on our own part is part of the healing process, too.

Steps to Open the Door and to Foster Help and Healing

Here are a few steps that also can help break down some of the obstacles toward discussing this issue and that can open the door to healing.

In a simple, conversational way, remind people that:

- (1) People are coming to a new understanding of the abortion issue, including the fact that most abortions are unwanted or coerced, and the many varying reasons that people have abortions and how it affects them;
- (2) It is heartbreaking that so many women and men have been personally hurt by abortion and that snap judgments and stereotypes about this issue abound. Often, public perceptions don't adequately reflect what's really going on;
- (3) I think we can do a better job of reaching out to people facing an unexpected or challenging pregnancy.
- (4) I think we need to educate people about available resources for women and families facing an unexpected or challenging pregnancy and get involved in helping those in our own communities facing such challenges.
- (5) I think we need to educate people about new programs that help women and men with such challenges and also post-abortion resources for hope and healing.

The steps can be simply summarized as:

- announcing your new understanding,
- expressing your compassion,
- acknowledging that post-abortion harm and heartbreak challenge all of us to better respond to the needs of women, men and families facing an unexpected or challenging pregnancy or situation, and
- mentioning new programs that help with outreach and healing.

Be Mindful of Deep Wounds and Personal Boundaries

Even if years or even decades have passed since an abortion, people may carry profound hurts surrounding these and related issues and still grieve the loss of a child through an unnatural abortion. Many abortions were unwanted or coerced via the many often subtle means of coercion, neglect or even abuse of power.

It's wise to respect these boundaries and avoid pressing for details or presuming issues surrounding a past abortion or any personal involvement in abortion. (Learn more about widespread coercion and other psychological and physical risks surrounding abortion at www.theunchoice.com/coerced.htm)

Here are some sample approaches to raise awareness or help:

“As I learn more about this issue, I have a whole new understanding about unwanted abortions, the various forms and types of coercion, and post-abortion issues. I never really understood before how much pressure that many individuals and couples may face. And I didn't realize before how often public and political rhetoric or spin can make them feel caught in the middle or judged and even condemned by others. These

and other issues can really make it hard for people to find the type of support they need. It can also interfere with the grieving process.”

“Did you know that most abortions are unwanted or coerced? Did you know that on average it takes around 10 years for women to recover emotionally from a past abortion? The good news is that more people are aware of these issues and that hope and healing are possible. More people are getting involved and helping in the journey toward healing. There are a lot of new programs now to help women and men who are dealing with pregnancy-related challenges or post-abortion problems.”

If someone discloses that they have had an abortion, you can help share their burden. Listening is among the greatest gifts you can give someone who is grieving. Non-judgmental compassion and a willingness to walk with someone on their journey is a great help.

If someone is seeking answers or more information, you can give them a copy of this booklet or other pregnancy- and post-abortion resources and user-friendly, evidence-based educational materials, designed for general audiences (all these things can be found online at www.theunchoice.com). Or, you can share more about what you already know about this issue. But at the very least you have planted the seeds. Those who have had abortions will know that you are someone who can understand and empathize with their feelings, and moreover, that you may know more about how to find healing.

Just remember these three key words:

- understanding
- compassion
- hope

The first step, expressing a new understanding, respects the mind. The second step, expressing compassion, soothes the emotions. The third step, offering hope, feeds the spirit.

By developing understanding, compassion, and hope surrounding this issue in millions of women and men, including both those who have been directly or indirectly involved in or affected by abortions and those who have not, we can quickly create a much more loving and healing environment. We can also rise to the challenge of doing a better job at the local and personal level of practically and emotionally supporting individuals and families among us facing pregnancy-related or other challenges.

Do's & Don'ts

What to say and not say

What to say — or not say — when talking to someone who has had an abortion

People's experiences with abortion vary widely. Contrary to popular belief, heartbreaking new evidence indicates that most abortions are unwanted or coerced. Many — even in America — are directly or indirectly forced.

The grief surrounding abortion can incorporate many “pre-abortion” abuses, deceptions and more; but, above all, women, men and families grieve the loss of a child. Many also grieve the loss of a beloved mother, sister, wife, daughter or friend who died before, during or after abortion.

When speaking with someone about a past abortion, listen with an open mind and offer to be there for them now and in the future, because the journey to healing is long and often lonely. For individuals and families personally affected, non-judgmental compassion can go a long way.

DO's

DON'Ts

DON'T shut them off by changing the subject.

DO listen patiently to everything they have to say. Expect and allow them to repeat themselves and to bring the subject up again later. They may need to sort out their feelings. Verbalizing them with someone who will listen helps.

DON'T presume to know their unique situation or circumstances, even if you have experienced something similar.

DO express your support and concern. Assure them that you're there for them in whatever way they may need, and that you are willing to walk with them on their journey. If they are struggling with feelings of personal or spiritual unforgiveness, it may help to remind them that others have ultimately found healing with the help of people and programs that provide support for those who have had abortions. (Find healing resources at www.theunchoice.com/healing.htm)

Some may also need to know or be reminded that there are no unforgivable sins and that God wants to forgive us. All we have to do ask and accept His mercy. Others may have already dealt with such issues and simply need to know someone stands with them in their grief.

DON'T deny that they lost a child.

DO reassure them that their feelings are normal. Others have experienced similar things and ultimately found healing. Build up a sense of hope that they can be healed and encourage them to trust in God's love, grace and mercy for themselves and their child. Remind them again of your own support in their journey.

DON'T presume that it was a wanted abortion. Don't encourage them to blame others, but don't *push* them to forgive others, especially since they may be at varying stages in their grief. Each individual's situation and process will vary widely.

DON'T dismiss their feelings or tell them they "did what was best," or to just "get over it."

DON'T suggest that having another child "someday" can make up for the one that was lost. This can negate their pain, suffering and feelings of loss for that particular child. Future children are a blessing and comfort, but they can't replace the child who was lost.

DON'T leave them without offering your support and, if needed, encouraging them to seek out the help of post-abortion counselors or peer support groups (you can find a list in this booklet).

DON'T be afraid to ask them how they are doing with it in the future.

DO realize that others may have been directly or indirectly involved in the abortion, perhaps pushing for abortion in ways that were coercive, abusive or even by force. Allow them to talk about this issue and vent emotions. If this is deeply painful or traumatic, you may want to share information about available resources and support from someone who can help them work through these issues (see this booklet for a list).

DO acknowledge their pain, any other issues that may have been involved and the tragic loss of their child. Acknowledge that it is a personal tragedy that may take a long time to absorb. Remind them that you are there for them. Remind them that healing is a long journey, but that others have walked this road and that help and support — including your own — is available (a list of groups that offer resources and support is available in this booklet).

DO acknowledge their loss and express your concern and support for them. Offer to be there for them if they need help or encouragement. Remind them to trust that God is with them in their journey and encourage them to entrust their child to God's care.

DO give them information about post-abortion hotlines or healing resources or other referral tips and information (if needed). If you don't have this information on hand, promise to get it to them within the week. Keep your promise.

DO show that you care by continuing to be a source of support or sounding board for them.



COUNSELING & OTHER RESOURCES

*Pregnancy- and abortion-related help, information
and resources for individuals and families.*



HELP FOR THOSE BEING COERCED TO ABORT

Center Against Forced Abortions

1-210-614-7157 or info@tcjff.org

www.thejusticefoundation.org/cafa

Provides legal resources and help for pregnant teens or women being coerced or forced into unwanted abortions. Also offers pregnancy center training.

PREGNANCY ASSISTANCE

Bethany Christian Services

1-800-238-4269

www.bethany.org

Offers pregnancy counseling, foster care, housing for pregnant women, family and marital counseling, and adoption services.

Birthright

1-800-550-4900

www.birthright.org

Offers pregnancy testing, clothing, parenting classes, adoption services, medical care, family counseling, and referrals for legal assistance.

Option Line

1-800-712-4357 or text "Helpline" to 313131

www.optionline.org

National network of pregnancy centers offering pregnancy tests, assistance with finding medical and professional services, counseling, care for single mothers and more. Trained consultants are available by phone or live chat 24 hours a day.

The Nurturing Network

1-800-866-4666

www.nurturingnetwork.org

Nationwide network of volunteers provides support for women facing crisis pregnancies. Offers help in finding employment, dealing with school, medical and legal help and more.

Mom, Dad ... I'm Pregnant

Available from www.amazon.com

Book helps families facing the unplanned pregnancy of their teen/young adult daughter or son.

HELP AFTER ABORTION

Abortion Recovery International

1-866-469-7326

www.abortionrecovery.org

Provides information and counseling for those suffering after abortion through a network of counselors and ministries. Find counselors by zip code on their web site.

Option Line

1-800-712-4357 or text "Helpline" to 313131

www.optionline.org

Refers for individual or group peer counseling throughout the country. Trained consultants take phone calls and email 24 hours a day.

Lumina: Hope & Healing After Abortion

1-877-586-4621

www.postabortionhelp.org

Offers group programs, retreats, and referrals to professional therapists, ministries, and clergy members trained in post-abortion stress.

National Memorial for the Unborn

1-800-505-5565

www.memorialfortheunborn.org

Memorial for parents and families to remember children lost to abortion. Offers referrals to post-abortion ministries nationwide.

National Office of Post Abortion Reconciliation & Healing

1-800-593-2273

www.noparb.org

Project Rachel program offers support to women and men of all faiths through a network of clergy, spiritual directors, and therapists.

Rachel's Vineyard Ministries

1-877-467-3463

www.rachelsvineyard.org

Offers post-abortion support groups and weekend retreats in the U.S. and abroad. See the web site for a schedule of upcoming retreats.

Ramah International

1-479-445-6070 or Sydna@aol.com

www.ramahinternational.org

Provides Christian counseling and support for post-abortive women.

Rachel's Vineyard Ministries

1-877-467-3463

www.rachelsvineyard.org/men/index.htm

Offers help through weekend retreats and one-on-one email support.

Reclaiming Fatherhood Site

www.menandabortion.info

A site helpful with articles and healing resources for men who have lost a child to abortion.

Find more information and resources for men at www.theunchoice.com/men.htm.

SUPPORT FOR MEN AFTER ABORTION**Abortion Recovery International**

1-866-469-7326

www.abortionrecovery.org

Provides information and counseling for men and families after abortion. Find counselors by zip code on their web site.

Lumina: Hope & Healing After Abortion

1-877-586-4621

www.postabortionhelp.org

Offers group programs, retreats, and referrals to professional therapists, ministries, and clergy members trained in post-abortion stress.

OTHER RESOURCES

Many groups listed here also offer support for grandparents, siblings and others hurt by abortion. Learn more at www.theunchoice.com/helpforothers.htm.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

This is just a partial list of the many national organizations that offer referrals or support for those facing pregnancy-related challenges, being coerced or forced into an unwanted abortion, or struggling with a past abortion. Local pregnancy centers and post-abortion support groups may also be listed in the Yellow Pages or online under "Abortion Alternatives."

While efforts were made to check out all of the organizations listed here, inclusion in this list does not necessarily constitute an endorsement by the Elliot Institute of any organization, their philosophies, or their practices.

Post-abortion ministries may offer a variety of different formats and approaches. Some are staffed by volunteers who offer peer counseling or other types of support, while others are staffed by professional therapists or counselors. An organization may offer support in a group setting, a Bible-study format, or one-on-one with a counselor or spiritual director. Individuals, couples or families seeking help should ask lots of questions in order to find a group or counselor with whom they feel comfortable. **Counseling services are confidential and, in many cases, free.**

Some people, especially those with a history of psychological problems or other trauma that may complicate healing, may need the help of a professional counselor. They should be put in touch with a therapist who has experience and training specifically in the field of post-abortion counseling. A post-abortion counseling ministry may be able to refer clients to a professional counselor if they do not have someone on staff.

Learn more about post-abortion counseling ministries at www.theunchoice.com/healing.htm